

PEOPLE & THINGS

FOR the first time since the Revolution a complete ballet company from Russia is coming to England. This company, some fifty strong, includes the Beryozka Ensemble, and is due to open in London at the Stoll Theatre on April 28 after a short season at Amsterdam beginning next Tuesday.

Details of the cast and the programme are not yet known in London, even at the Soviet Embassy, and news from Amsterdam is anxiously awaited.

Thanks are due above all to Mr. Peter Daubeny for this wonderful news. Coming on top of his introduction to English audiences of Katherine Dunham, Antonio and Rosario, the Ballets de Roland Petit, and the Yugoslav State Company, he must now be regarded as one of our foremost impresarios.

Our Rotting Heritage

THE Report of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries was sold out at the Stationery Office on the day of publication. But the public will be able to enjoy its extraordinary revelations and its forceful prose at the libraries.

Recent controversy about museums and galleries has concentrated too much on questions of taste. It is not by financing a lot of showy purchases that the Government should fulfil its duty to the nation, but by enabling the British Museum to house and catalogue its collections and the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery to hang their pictures and keep them in decent repair. What we need, as the Report suggests, is a single authority who would co-ordinate these activities, and who would point out to the Government that it is unwise to buy a Cézanne at the top of the market at a time when, half a mile away, other priceless artistic possessions are disintegrating. I nominate the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, Chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission.

Nature Note

DISMAYED, as who is not, by the plague of octopuses which is invading the southern shores of our island, I was one of a select band of vigilant citizens who attended last week at the Natural History Museum a lecture on the octopus family by Experimental Officer Miss R. M. Thackeray.

Briefly, the octopus and its cousin, the squid, are the finest flower of the whole cephalopod family, which includes such miracles of evolution as the pearly nautilus. Octopuses invade England from the neighbourhood of Spain when we have a warm winter, and the last armada was in 1900. The largest caught here was eight foot across from tentacle to tentacle, and they irritate the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries by preying on our crabs and lobsters. They are very good to eat when fresh, softened with a wooden mallet and boiled. (But I do not recommend tinned octopus cooked in its own ink, which is a Portuguese delicacy.)

One Monster Eye

SQUIDS are miraculous creatures which progress through the water very fast by jet propulsion. In defence both they and the

By ATTICUS

Spur to Fame

*Sitting still and wishing
Makes no person great.
The good Lord sends the
fishing.
But you must dig the bait.*

GREAT men are always being asked if they can put their finger on some single piece of wisdom which has been their inspiration through life; and there is a fortune waiting for the industrious anthologist who will one day collect their replies. He should not miss these doggerel lines which the Poet Laureate, Mr. John Masefield, O.M., heard when he was seventeen and which, he says, have also inspired many hundreds of others—mostly budding authors, one suspects—to whom he sent them.

octopus squirt out a cloud of ink (the original Sepia) which may be to frighten or clog the gills of their attackers or to produce a dummy silhouette in the fashion of some of our anti-radar devices.

Monster members of the family live in the great depths of the sea and are devoured by whales which can dive to a depth of five miles. Brigadier Lindemann, the brother of Lord Cherwell, once told me that an octopus's eye a foot wide had been found in the belly of a whale and Miss Thackeray confirmed that this was quite possible.

So much for octopuses.

Krakatoa—Eniwetok

SINCE the latest hydrogen bomb dropped by parachute near Eniwetok exploded above the surface of the sea, it was presumably fitted with a proximity fuse. Probably one of Washington's major concerns was the correct behaviour of this delicate electronic device, for an explosion in the sea might have had grave consequences. When Krakatoa erupted in May, 1883, in the Sunda Strait, Indonesia, the comparatively insignificant explosion created waves which reached Cape Horn (7,800 miles away) and one of them with a height of thirty feet arrived in the English Channel.

A Feast of Fun

"THE New Yorker" brings me news of another surprise party recently held in America. The theme was "A Royal Repast" and guests had to come arrayed as drinks or food. I am indebted to the "New Orleans Times-Picayune" for the following sartorial notes:

"Mrs. Waguespack represented a shrimp cocktail in a gown of shrimp-coloured satin, studded with sequins. Her headpiece consisted of a huge sequined shrimp. The duke, who accompanied her to the royal throne, represented an oyster cocktail.

"Mrs. Boutillier and her duke represented a tomato salad, with the duke as the supreme lettuce. The maid's gown was of shocking pink slipper satin while her headpiece was a sequined tomato.

"Miss Patricia Ann Lagasse was

arrayed as an artichoke in a be-sequined green slipper satin frock. Her headpiece was a huge sequined artichoke while her duke was arrayed as a carrot. Mrs. Liberto represented a broiled steak. Miss Jo Ann Lagasse a cheese assortment. . . ."

But enough. It is surely Mrs. Waguespack all the way.

Dolphin in Chains

FRIENDS of Commander Cousteau, the famous underwater explorer whose research ship Calypso is now working for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in the Persian Gulf, receive from time to time a Roneoed bulletin called "Le Dauphin Enchaîné." This is the ship's newspaper of the Calypso and it is edited by James Dugan, the young American who has accompanied Cousteau on many of his exploits and whose "Great Iron Ship" has been a best-seller here and in America. I like the editor's instruction that "Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed bottle."

Splendid Centenary

THIS year marks the centenary of Balacava and of Florence Nightingale's arrival in the Crimea and there will be a series of celebrations in all of which Mrs. Cecil Woodham-Smith will play a leading part.

The B.B.C. will be first with a programme commemorating Miss Nightingale's birthday on May 12. On November 4, the date of her landing at Scutari, there will be a commemoration service in Westminster Abbey organised by the War Office. Her favourite hymns will be sung ("The Son of God Goes Forth to War," "Onward Christian Soldiers!" and "Fight the Good Fight"), her favourite collects used and her favourite passage from the New Testament read as a lesson. There will be bands and troops, and Whitehall will be lined with nurses.

Saint Florence

THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER who is a Hussar, will be present as well as members of the Cardigan, Lucan, and Raglan families on November 6 at a Balacava dinner at Deane Park to which the first- and second-in-command of every regiment which took part in the Charge will be invited.

It is interesting to reflect that in some other countries Florence Nightingale would surely have been canonised. In England her memory will remain evergreen, thanks to Mrs. Woodham-Smith's wonderful biography which has now sold over 370,000 copies in English and has been translated into ten foreign languages. Her memorial to the Charge of the Light Brigade, "The Reason Why," although published only six months ago, looks, according to Constables, as if it will be equally famous.

More Double Talk

IN America, George Jessel, the "Gracie Fields" of Broadway has succeeded the late Damar Runyon as the king of incoherence. The other day he interrupted a conversation with my New York correspondent with the words: "I've got an uncle. Very tough man. He's so tough you can't ever throttle him."